

Jan Woudstra, University of Sheffield

The Use of Archaeology in Garden Conservation and Design

Some case studies

While there are early examples of the application of garden archaeology in Britain dating back to the 1930s, its modern use and application dates from the 1980s. Initially it was used to obtain more information on garden buildings, for example at Painshill, so that they might be reconstructed accurately. At Chiswick House Grounds a partnership between the owner of the grounds, the London Borough of Hounslow, and the owner of the house, English Heritage, commissioned archaeology at various stages of the implementation of the restoration masterplan (1987). One of the first areas to be investigated at this early eighteenth century landscape was the cedar avenue in front of the house, which had been proposed for replanting. Here historical illustrations provided varied evidence of either six or eight trees, and it was suggested that archaeology might provide conclusive evidence for the exact number and location. This proved to be the case with remains for four trees on either side of the forecourt being revealed, which were later replanted. This encouraging start led to archaeology being commissioned to establish the formation of trees in the grove to the north of the villa. Unfortunately the acid soil and subsequent disturbance had eliminated any evidence, and replanting in this area had to take a more conjectural approach.

Archaeology was subsequently integrated at each stage of the restoration programme, with the reconstruction of the terrace ori-

ginally designed to provide good views over the garden and towards the Thames, and the late eighteenth century rosary as particularly positive examples, where much detail was provided in the process.

The garden archaeology carried out at the Privy Garden at Hampton Court (1992–1994) remains unequalled elsewhere, both in scale and extent. Here whole scale excavation revealed details about the garden, which together with surviving trees and archival evidence provided an accurate base for reconstruction of the garden. Detail provided by the archaeology ranged from the manner of construction, including the order in which the various parts of the garden had originally been prepared and how, to the original levels in the various parts of the garden and an exact understanding of the drainage system. It also indicated the original treatment to ameliorate the soil. Part of the importance of this excavation lies in the fact that it was both well analysed and the results made available in a publication.

Not all archaeological excavations merit publication to this extent, nor do all sites merit such detailed investigation. Yet archaeology is often a planning requirement and can sometimes be used as a lever for development. At Adlestrop Park, Gloucestershire, an important late eighteenth century house set in parkland modified by Humphry Repton, various parts of the estate had been sold off

to separate owners. The private owners who acquired the ruined house in the early 1990s embarked on a restoration programme of house and park, and also foresaw new facilities in the area immediately surrounding the house, including a new stable block and kitchen garden. As with the aid of archaeology it could be proven that the proposals respected the pre-Repton layout, were in scale with the historic plot divisions, and did not affect any later landscape phases, planning consent was duly granted.

These examples show that there are various applications for garden archaeology in conservation projects, but also that it now has almost become an indispensable tool for the landscape architect in order to more fully understand the sites they are working with.